



# New Opportunities in Hazmat Operations for East Palo Alto Residents

## EAST PALO ALTO, CA

**M**ore than one hundred members of the community surrounding East Palo Alto, California have discovered a promising future in hazardous waste operations, thanks to U.S. EPA's Brownfields Initiative, local stakeholders, community organizations, and the efforts of several Stanford University interns.

With nearly 25,000 residents within a 2.5 square-mile area, East Palo Alto's population is ethnically diverse, with an 86 percent minority rate. The city has no central business district, and has typically suffered low real estate sales and property tax revenues. Much-needed redevelopment of the city's blighted areas has been hampered by the perception of widespread environmental contamination.

In response to these problems, EPA announced the award of \$170,000 to the City of East Palo Alto in 1997 as part of the Agency's Brownfields Pilot program in 1997. The Pilot helped to establish a hazardous materials job training program that same year, forming a partnership that includes the Occupational Industrialization Center West, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters, the Center to Protect Workers'

## JUST THE FACTS:

- The Pilot worked with many community members, including interns from Stanford University, to encourage local youth participation in a hazardous materials job training program.
- The first of its kind in the country, the program offers instruction in Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response.
- More than 90 percent of the program's 113 graduates are now working in environmental or carpentry fields.

*Partly as a result of the program's successes, Vice President Gore announced East Palo Alto as one of 16 Showcase Communities, selected from more than 231 applicants by a Brownfields National Partnership of more than 20 Federal agencies and other organizations.*

**EPA's** Brownfields Economic Redevelopment Initiative is designed to empower states, communities, and other stakeholders in economic redevelopment to work together in a timely manner to prevent, assess, safely clean up, and sustainably reuse brownfields. A brownfield is a site, or portion thereof, that has actual or perceived contamination and an active potential for redevelopment or reuse. EPA is funding: assessment demonstration pilot programs (each funded up to \$200,000 over two years), to assess brownfields sites and to test cleanup and redevelopment models; job training pilot programs (each funded up to \$200,000 over two years), to provide training for residents of communities affected by brownfields to facilitate cleanup of brownfields sites and prepare trainees for future employment in the environmental field; and, cleanup revolving loan fund programs (each funded up to \$500,000 over five years) to capitalize loan funds to make loans for the environmental cleanup of brownfields. These pilot programs are intended to provide EPA, states, tribes, municipalities, and communities with useful information and strategies as they continue to seek new methods to promote a unified approach to site assessment, environmental cleanup, and redevelopment.

Rights, De Paul University, the Building Trades Council, the City of East Palo Alto, and EPA Region 9. The first of its kind in the country, the East Palo Alto Brownfields Job Training Program offers instruction in Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response, underground storage tank removal, lead and asbestos removal, and pre-apprenticeship training in carpentry. The first of these classes was funded by the National Institute of Environmental Health Services, through a grant with DePaul University. Subsequent classes have been funded by NIEHS through a grant with the United Brotherhood of Carpenters. The Pilot currently remains on the Job Training program's advisory committee, and provides the names of graduates to companies looking for employees with related skills.

The first four of East Palo Alto's Job Training classes have been completed, and 102 of the program's 113 graduates have been placed in either environmental or carpentry fields. The program also works with the San Mateo County Probation Department to recruit students, in an effort to turn lives in a positive direction. Demand for the skills of the program's graduates is expected to increase, as the City of East Palo Alto has three sizable redevelopment project areas.

As a result of the program's successes, Vice President Gore announced East Palo Alto as one of 16 Showcase Communities selected by a Brownfields National Partnership of more than 18 federal agencies. Chosen from more than 231 applicants, the city received another \$200,000, and the support of a full-time EPA representative, to address additional sites with redevelopment potential. For more information on the East Palo Alto Brownfields Pilot, contact Thomas Mix at (415) 744-2378.

## **CONTACTS:**

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Visit the EPA Brownfields web site at:  
<http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/>

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